

General Election 2019

An analysis of manifesto plans for education

Priority 4: Teacher recruitment and retention

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Research Area:
Election Analysis



Priority 4: Teacher recruitment and retention

Teacher quality is widely accepted to be one of the most important factors in determining pupil attainment, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. An adequate supply of effective teachers is central to ensuring high educational standards, but England is currently experiencing teacher shortages that are likely to worsen in the coming years if left unaddressed.

Challenges to the supply of quality teachers are particularly acute in secondary schools, which is where the disadvantage gap is widest.

The current landscape

Teacher recruitment and retention

In recent years, teacher numbers in both primary and secondary schools have failed to rise in line with increasing pupil numbers.¹ There are particular recruitment challenges in specific subjects and in more disadvantaged schools. Physics and mathematics are subjects with particularly low levels of teachers with a relevant degree, indicating a potentially smaller pool of possible recruits.

The quality and stability of the workforce in disadvantaged schools has been a long-running issue. Teachers in these schools tend to be younger, less experienced and with shorter tenures.² Emerging evidence finds that higher teacher turnover has a small but detrimental impact on average student attainment.³

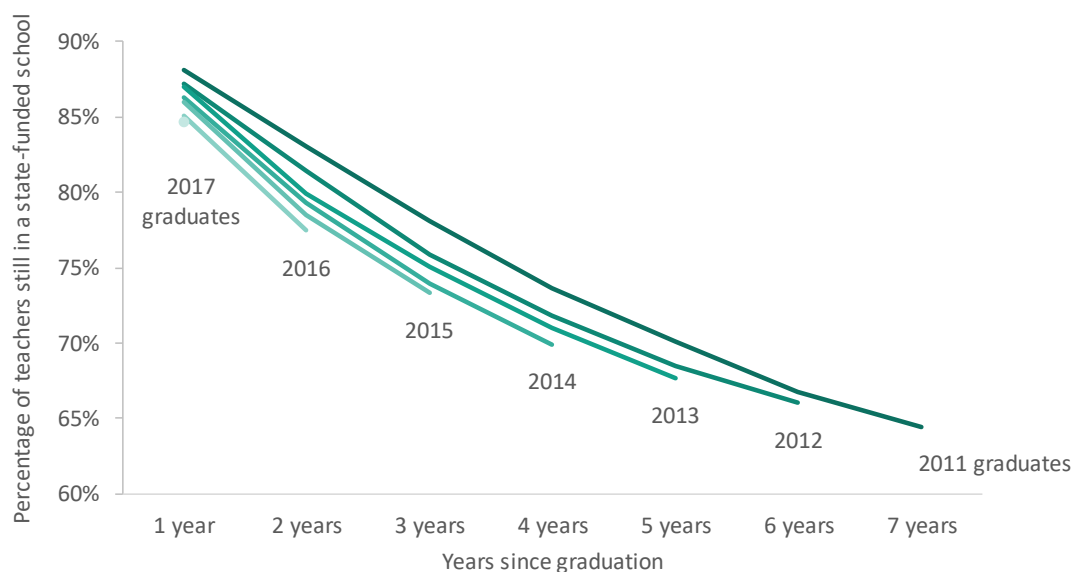
While most acute in disadvantaged schools, the problem of recruitment and retention within the secondary teacher workforce is felt across a range of settings. Teacher recruitment targets have been persistently missed and dropout rates are on the rise (Figure 4.1). In special schools, teacher exit rates have risen from 9.1 per cent in 2011 to 11.3 per cent in 2018. Teacher exit rates in primary schools have also been creeping up in recent years, however the issue is not so acute as in secondary schools.

¹ Luke Sibbets, 'The Teacher Labour Market in England: Shortages, Subject Expertise and Incentives', (August 2018)

² Rebecca Allen, Simon Burgess, and Jennifer Mayo, 'The Teacher Labour Market, Teacher Turnover and Disadvantaged Schools: New Evidence for England', (January 2018)

³ Stephen Gibbons, Vincenzo Scrutino, and Shqiponja Telhaj, 'Teacher Turnover: Does It Matter for Pupil Achievement?', (February 2018)

Figure 4.1: Percentage of teachers leaving state-funded schools by year in which they qualified and years since qualification⁴



Teacher workload and working conditions

Workload is often cited by teachers as a serious concern in surveys, and teachers in England work longer hours compared to other high performing OECD countries, though recent research has argued that this is not new.⁵

Nevertheless, more detailed analysis tells us that the issue is not as straightforward as the total number of hours worked. Primary teachers work more hours than secondary teachers, and yet retention rates for primary teachers are better than they are for secondary teachers.⁶ Analysis of international data collected through the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) suggested that other important factors are how supported teachers feel and their overall job satisfaction.⁷

Overall, it would appear that reducing hours worked may only be part of the solution, alongside improving school leadership, working conditions and training opportunities.

Teacher pay

Teacher pay also appears to be an important factor in the teacher workforce challenge, especially for retaining teachers in certain subject areas. Data published by Department for Education in September 2018 finds that teachers in maths and physics have some of the lowest retention rates.⁸ Figure 4.2 shows that graduates with degrees in science, technology, engineering or maths disciplines (STEM subjects) tend to earn more outside of teaching, whilst teachers with non-STEM

⁴ DfE, 'School workforce in England: November 2018', (June 2019)

⁵ Rebecca Allen et al., 'New Evidence on Teachers' Working Hours in England. An Empirical Analysis of Four Datasets', (September 2019)

⁶ Matt Walker, Jack Worth and Jens Van den Brande, 'Teacher workload survey 2019: Research report', (October 2019)

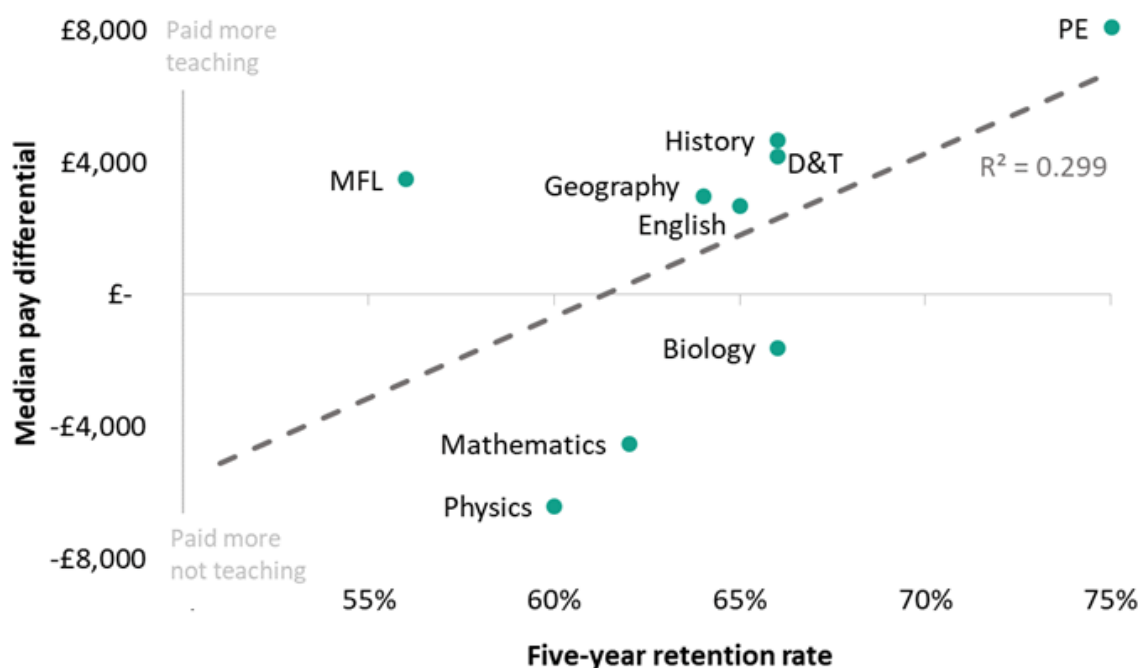
⁷ Sam Sims, 'Modelling the Relationships between Teacher Working Conditions, Job Satisfaction and Workplace Mobility', (Forthcoming)

⁸ Department for Education, 'Analysis of Teacher Supply, Retention and Mobility', (September 2018)

degrees tend to earn more as teachers. These teachers with a smaller ‘outside pay gap’ tend to have higher retention rates than those with STEM-degrees.

The government’s one-year spending round, published in September 2019, announced a significant increase in the starting salaries for teachers to £30,000 by 2022/23, an increase of 25 per cent in three years.⁹

Figure 4.2: Retention and earnings outside teaching, by degree subject



In the immediate future, challenges in the quality and supply of teachers could become more acute than those faced by recent governments. This is because of a population bulge that is set to cause an increase in the number of secondary pupils by nearly 10 per cent from 2019 to 2023. If current trends in recruitment, retention and unequal distribution are left unaddressed by future governments, schools will be faced with difficult decisions about the breadth of their curriculum, class sizes, and their ability to provide for pupils with additional needs.

One important innovation in the government’s recent recruitment and retention strategy is the reform of training bursaries, targeting phased pay incentives at teachers in the subjects and disadvantaged areas where retention challenges are most pressing. This aligns with previous recommendations that salary bonuses in shortage subjects should be introduced with some urgency.¹ There are still concerns around the proposed timing of these bursary reforms, as by the time they are introduced the teacher gap will be substantially larger.

What should a new government do?

Education research suggests that priorities should:

- include the pay and quality of early career teachers

⁹ Department for Education, ‘£30,000 Starting Salaries Proposed for Teachers’, (September 2019)

- encourage the recruitment of teachers into shortage subjects and into schools in more disadvantaged areas

The overarching approach amongst most of the parties is a focus on tackling the recruitment and retention crisis. Approaches are mainly centred around raising teacher pay and reducing workload. Teacher pay is approached both through raising starting salaries and through the size of annual increases for the existing school workforce. Strategies for alleviating workload follow a general common thread for the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green parties of scrapping formal assessments in primary schools, reducing class sizes, and reforming school accountability. In one instance, there is also a focus on teacher entitlement to formalised continuous professional development.

The main issue left unaddressed in manifestos is how parties plan to aid recruitment and retention of teachers in certain shortage subjects or more disadvantaged parts of the country.

Manifesto commitments

Increasing teacher pay

The Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties have all committed to increasing teacher pay. The intention of all these policies is broadly that the pay rises would act as a retention mechanism for existing teachers. Schools would ultimately continue to determine how staff are paid, but upper and lower boundaries of pay ranges would be adjusted accordingly. Academy status allows individual schools to set their own pay structures, and around a fifth of multi-academy trusts report that most or all of their schools do this.¹⁰ The Labour Party have said they will introduce a ‘common rulebook’ for all schools and a return to national pay settlements, so this flexibility will be lost.

The Conservative manifesto makes no mention of raising teacher salaries in future, beyond the 2.75 per cent uplift committed to for the current 2019/20 academic year as in line with the recommendation of the School Teachers’ Review Board (STRB).¹¹ It is not clear whether the Conservative Party is committed to continuing to raise teacher pay by similar levels each year.

The Liberal Democrats have pledged an increase of “at least three per cent per year throughout the parliament”.

Finally, the Labour Party has pledged the largest increase as part of their broader commitment to increase pay for all public sector workers. The manifesto states the intention to “restore public sector pay to at least pre-financial crisis levels (in real terms), by delivering year-on-year above-inflation pay rises, starting with a 5 per cent increase”.

The Conservative Party has pledged to raise teacher starting salaries to a minimum of £30,000, as have the Liberal Democrats, in addition to the 3 per cent salary increase for existing teachers committed to above. The intention is to make teacher salaries more competitive in the graduate labour market, with a view to attracting additional and potentially more highly qualified individuals

¹⁰ Rob Cirin, ‘Academy trust survey 2017: Research report’, (July 2017)

¹¹ Department for Education, ‘School teachers’ pay to rise by 2.75%’, (July 2019)

into becoming early career teachers. The current government has said that it would deliver this rise by 2022/23 and the Liberal Democrats have matched that commitment.¹²

Our analysis of school funding provides broad estimates of the cost of these pay rises. An increase of 2.75 per cent per year, as proposed by the Conservative Party, would increase expenditure on teachers by around £2bn by 2022-23. The increases of 5 per cent proposed by the Labour Party would cost £1.2bn in the first year and £3.8bn in 2022-23 if there were similar increases each year. The Labour Party say that this would be provided outside of the core schools budget, but it is not clear what additional budget would be allocated to the Department for Education or how this would be distributed among schools.¹³ In the absence of any other funding commitment we assume that the Liberal Democrat policy of an annual three per cent pay rise would come out of the proposed schools budget.

The Liberal Democrat Party pledge to increase teacher numbers by 20,000 – through a combination of increased recruitment and improved retention. This increase cannot be guaranteed, effectively because spending and teacher recruitment are within the control of schools. The pledge can be more accurately stated as an intention to fund schools, via core school funding, to enable them to recruit this number of additional teachers, and it must be intended that offers on teacher pay and CPD entitlements (discussed below) will improve numbers through recruitment and retention.

Any pay increases for teachers will need to be properly funded without creating new pressures on school budgets, as underlined by the preceding analysis of school funding.

Targeted policies to address subject shortages and disadvantage

There is a need to address the uneven distribution of teachers in shortage subjects, particularly those teaching in the least affluent areas, and evidence suggests that targeted bursaries and pay supplements can be effective in addressing this. The government announced such a scheme in January 2019 in its Recruitment and Retention Strategy which included plans to reform teacher bursaries to target specific shortage subjects and to weight retention payments in favour of teachers working in more challenging areas.¹⁴ Another feature of this strategy is the Early Careers Framework which is intended to strengthen an early career teachers' entitlement to support and training time.

This Recruitment and Retention Strategy, including the policies of targeted pay and the Early Careers Framework, is not mentioned in any manifesto. We assume that, with no statement to the contrary, the strategy will be carried over as government policy. It is striking that, given the urgency of teacher recruitment and retention, no party has explicitly pledged to take these policies forward.

One party pledge that does aim to tackle the shortage of teachers with relevant qualifications in the subjects they teach is contained in the Liberal Democrat manifesto. It pledges to introduce a “clear and properly funded entitlement” for “genuinely high-quality professional development for all teachers – rising to the level of 50 hours per year by 2025.” The pledge also includes extra training for teachers who are required to teach subjects at secondary level where they themselves do not

¹² Department for Education, *‘£30,000 Starting Salaries Proposed for Teachers’*, (September 2019)

¹³ Labour Party, *‘Funding real change’*, (November 2019)

¹⁴ Department for Education *‘Teacher recruitment and retention strategy’*, (January 2019)

have a post A-level qualification. This is with the intention to “ensure teachers are empowered to focus on delivering a high-quality education to their pupils”.

The Teaching and Learning International Survey 2018 estimated that full-time primary school teachers spend 1.4 hours on average a week on professional development, with secondary full-time teachers averaging 1.1 hours (for part-time teachers this was 0.8 hours and 0.7 hours a week respectively).¹⁵ Assuming 39 weeks in a school year, and that teachers do not engage in CPD outside of the school year, this would imply primary teachers are spending 55 hours a year, and secondary teachers are spending 43 hours a year, on CPD. Based on these estimates (which are likely to vary with other surveys), primary teachers are already accessing the pledged entitlement with secondary teachers some way behind.

However, it is difficult to obtain consistent and reliable estimates of how many hours teachers are currently spending on professional development each week. Even within the same survey, teachers can report different numbers of *total* working hours depending on how that information is derived.¹⁶ Therefore, estimates of average hours spent on development activity such as these should be treated with some caution.

A key issue is the quality of the CPD currently being accessed. The Department for Education has set out standards for teachers’ professional development.¹⁷ It is uncertain how far these standards are met across schools’ current CPD offer. Indeed, while the evidence base for what constitutes *high-quality* professional development for teachers has strengthened in recent years, there is still some way to go in understanding exactly how training can best support teachers to improve pupil attainment in different settings or to stay in the teaching profession, and how this can be delivered at different scales.¹⁸

Statistics from the Department for Education suggest that schools are currently spending around £300m a year on staff development and training.¹⁹ It can be assumed that this expenditure would need to be higher in order to achieve the quality of CPD pledged by the Liberal Democrats at this scale. If implemented, it would be important for an incoming government to focus on quality and cost-effectiveness of the training available, as a priority over the number of hours a teacher is entitled to.

Teacher workload

The Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, and the Green Party all propose to reduce teacher workload by abolishing statutory tests in primary schools and by reforming school accountability.

¹⁵ John Jerrim and Sam Sims, *The Teaching and Learning International Survey 2018: Research report*, (June 2019)

¹⁶ Rebecca Allen et al, *New evidence on teachers’ working hours in England. An empirical analysis of four datasets*, (September 2019)

¹⁷ Department for Education, *Standard for teachers’ professional development*, (July 2016)

¹⁸ Helen Timperley et al, *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)*, (2007); Philippa Cordingley et al, *Understanding What Enables High Quality Professional Learning*, (August 2012)

¹⁹ Department for Education, *Trends in school spending: 2002-2016*, (August 2018); Per pupil spend multiplied by number of pupils in January 2019 and in 2019-20 prices.

Whilst these reforms have broader aims in shaping the school system, one of their aims is in essence to 'let teachers focus on teaching' through cutting other demands on their time.

In a similar vein, there are also pledges to reduce class sizes. The Green Party has pledged to focus funding to reduce class sizes down to under 20 in the long term, with the intention of helping "teachers focus on individual pupil needs". The Labour Party has pledged that primary school classes should be a maximum of 30 pupils.

Labour has also pledged to fund more non-contact time for teachers to prepare and plan.

Neither the Conservative Party nor the Brexit Party refer to policies in this area.

Many of these reforms to tackle workload are targeted at primary schools when the recruitment and retention issue is most acute and urgent in secondary schools. Moreover, it is not a given that tackling teacher workload, at least in terms of the number of hours worked, would have bearing on improving teacher retention. This is because the evidence is mixed on whether hours worked is at the root of the workforce issues in secondary schools. However, it is not clear that the purpose of these pledges is directly to reduce the number of hours worked, but rather to allow teachers to focus their time on activity they feel is more meaningful in terms of encouraging progress in their pupils – though again, this would be the case in primary rather than secondary schools.

On class sizes, we have considered implications for funding, as discussed under Priority 3, but it is also worth considering the evidence on how this would impact on teacher recruitment needs and retention if the proposal to limit primary school classes to 30 pupils were to be achieved.

Assuming that enough teachers can be supplied to meet demand of maximum class sizes of 30 across primary schools, reducing class sizes in this way may potentially contribute to enabling teachers to dedicate time to activities they feel are meaningful for encouraging pupil progress. However, the evidence on the impact on pupil attainment of reduced class sizes suggests that class sizes would need to be substantially smaller than 30 in order to have a notable impact on pupil attainment.²⁰ While the evidence is thin here, this might indicate that a reduction of class sizes to 30 maximum may not in fact be enough to have an impact on how teachers feel about their work. Once again, this should be caveated with the point that it is not in primary schools that most attention needs to be focused when it comes to reducing workload or alleviating retention issues.

Overall assessment

The Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties have all pledged to increase teacher pay, with Labour's commitment being the most generous. The Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties have additionally committed to improving pay for early career teachers. However, there is no explicit mention of targeted pay incentives where retention and recruitment issues are most challenging.

The only party with a pledged focus on improving the quality of teachers is the Liberal Democrat Party. Their commitment to introduce a formalised CPD entitlement, particularly the offer targeted at teachers without qualifications beyond A level in their taught subject, is the only explicit mention of targeting recruitment challenges in specific subject areas.

²⁰ Education Endowment Foundation, *'Reducing class sizes'*, (August 2018)

The measures proposed by Labour, the Liberal Democrat and Green parties to change the focus of teachers' work through reforming accountability and assessment are all focused within primary schools and therefore are not targeted at where the recruitment and retention issues are most acute.